

March 13, 2020

Good afternoon, St. Mark's Family,

Yesterday you received an email detailing precautions that have been put in place at St. Mark's in the face of the COVID-19 threat. Today, after listening to our Governor declare a State of Emergency and call for a community-wide response in order to mitigate the spread of the virus and save lives, I am afraid that there is more we need to do.

[Minnesota is now recommending the suspension of public gatherings \(large gatherings with 250+ people and smaller gatherings with fewer than 250 people that are held in settings that do not allow social distancing of six feet per person\).](#) Experts say that collective action may help to flatten the virus' growth curve, which, in turn, has the potential to decrease the risk to those most vulnerable to the disease (e.g., the aged, those with underlying health conditions).

It is out of our deep and abiding love for the neighbor that, effective immediately, we are cancelling Sunday and Wednesday worship, Wednesday supper and other activities, including Bible studies, through March 29. At that time we will make decisions based on the latest information and instructions from health professionals as we move further into this uncharted territory. In taking this step, we are joining many other churches throughout the cities who have done the same, among them ELCA congregations: St. Andrews, Mahtomedi; Grace University, Minneapolis; Shepherd of the Valley, Apple Valley; Holy Trinity, Minneapolis; Roseville Lutheran, Roseville; Gloria Dei, St. Paul.

We trust that God will continue to guide our ministry during this time. Watch your email, our website, and social media for updates, worship suggestions, and opportunities for connection. If you know of St. Mark's households who do not have access to email, please help us by reaching out to them to share this news.

Pastors and staff will continue to serve, and don't be afraid to reach out to us for conversation or pastoral care. We are here, we just need to be mindful of "social distancing".

One of the implications of cancelling Sunday and Wednesday worship is that our regular offering will not be collected. It's essential to support our ministries and keep current with our responsibilities. Even in the midst of uncertainty, we are called to be generous. Please mail your offering to the church or give electronically. Knowing that our income could be impacted, we invite those with extra resources to consider making a special gift.

During this season of Lent, as we journey toward the promise of an Easter grave emptied by the power of love, we join our prayers with those around the world:

*May we who are merely inconvenienced
remember those whose lives are at stake.*

*May we who have no risk factors
remember those most vulnerable.*

*May we who have the luxury of working from home
remember those who must choose between
preserving their health or making their rent.*

*May we who have the flexibility to care for
our children when their schools close
remember those who have no options.*

*May we who have to cancel our trips
remember those who have no safe place to go.*

*May we who are losing our margin money
in the tumult of the economic market
remember those who have no margin at all.*

*May we who settle in for a quarantine at home
remember those who have no home.*

*As fear grips our country,
let us choose love.*

*During this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms around each other,
let us yet find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbors.*

Amen.

From Cameron Bellm of Seattle

God's Peace,

Pastor Mary and Pastor Ivy

Executive Committee Members Beth Ingberg, Karen Biedermann, and Josh Hirman